

## **Local Authorities Major Group (LAMG)**

### **Gathered within the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments (LRGs)**

#### **HLPF 2023 Sectoral Position Paper – Full Paper**

As we reach the mid-point review of the 2030 Agenda, local and regional governments need to be recognized as essential partners and drivers of progress at the international decision-making tables spearheading new forms of multilateralism.

Local and regional governments, as the sphere of government closest to communities, to their needs, challenges and aspirations and play a crucial role in accelerating progress towards the SDGs. Whether it be through the provision of education, food, water, care services, urban planning, climate protection, urban mobility, waste management or health beyond healthcare, the provision of local public services has been central in responding to and addressing the multiple crises faced today, and in illustrating the intrinsic connection between SDG 11 on sustainable cities and territories and the other SDGs. Education and awareness raising campaigns are also crucial here to mobilize the citizenship and engage them in reaching 2030 Agenda.

The multilateral system needs to consider the many dimensions of an urban world: a system of rural and urban territories, small and intermediary cities, metropolitan entities and regions; and delivering financial support and capacity development for local and regional governments as well as adequate multilevel governance reforms that lead to enabling environments for local action. This will be key especially key in light of the UN Summit of the Future in which the UN is asking for all member states, stakeholders and sectors to envision the future they want.

To achieve the 2030 Agenda, SDG 11 and localization, there is an urgent need to address inequalities and their root causes to develop a new social contract that works for all and that leaves no one and no place behind. Achieving SDG 11 calls for a feminist approach to urban and territorial development, through enabling dialogues and collaborations across local and regional governments and sectors of the population, and enabling active participation in planning processes. It also calls for increased action on housing, thus guaranteeing the right to adequate housing, fostering inclusive housing systems grounded on care, and devising joint strategies to defend housing as a vehicle for equality, justice, and community-building, rather than inequality and segregation.

**Within this context, and in light of the 2023 United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, and the SDGs in review: clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 11), sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), and partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17), the Local Authorities Major Group recalls the following key issues:**

## **1. The Next Generation of local public service provision**

Local public provision is the backbone of our cities, towns and territories ensuring that all communities, regardless of administrative status or any other condition, can live healthy and sustainable lives, through the provision of water and sanitation, housing, food security, education and health. It also makes the difference between accessing opportunity, through public transport, care, counseling and mental health, through social services, and facilitates community building through public space, local initiatives and dialogue.

**The interconnection between local public service provision, the achievement of SDG 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities, and the 2030 agenda is beyond any doubt and throughout the last years, a next generation of public service provision has come to light - one that puts people and care at the center.** A next generation of public service provision that is based on care services where care work is no longer discriminatingly falling on migrant communities and women, where accessibility is at the heart of our policies ensuring they are human-centered, where access to the internet and technology to all is considered a baseline, where mental health care and social counseling for people of all ages is available, where the upskilling of people is prioritized to empower communities and foster human creativity. **This next generation of public services needs to be recognized at all levels and strengthened through a new way of financing development.**

**The Local Authorities Major Group calls for:**

- **Recognizing the key role that local and regional public service provision plays in protecting people and the planet and its key link to the implementation of SDG 11 and all other SDGs and strengthening them through a new way of looking at finance.**
- **Supporting and fostering the next generation of local and regional public service provision which puts care at the center, that is people centered and accessible to all, and that fosters delivering health and healthcare, taking into account innovation and digital transformation, and which fosters the education and upskilling of all.**
- **Including local and regional governments, who demonstrated the power of policy based on solidarity, in decision-making at all levels and in the management of complex emergencies.**

## **2. A new social contract and addressing inequalities**

The impact of the pandemic among those who already had less opportunities is tangible. Workers and persons living in informality, mostly migrant and displaced communities, together with women, children, persons with disabilities, marginalized groups and older persons, have been among the hardest hit. To address current inequalities, we need to address their multidimensional roots and look at them between countries, as well as within them.

**Addressing inequalities and their multidimensional roots is vital for a new social contract based on justice and democracy.** This starts with recognizing and guaranteeing the rights, needs and aspirations of the historically marginalized and fostering gender equality and the participation of local feminist leaders in decision-making as core to democracy. Access to rights is unequal and often depends on administrative status, including for younger generations that remain in irregular situations from birth. This also calls for seeing our cities and territories through an accessibility lens, to ensure that all people, everywhere, can freely and safely live and thrive.

In November 2022, we surpassed 8 billion people in our world. Developing inclusive and more equal societies is the key to ensure that all inviting people live healthy lives, and the key to developing demographic resilience and face the overlapping crises. We can no longer live in a world in which women and girls are denied equal access to education, in which half the population is denied access to healthcare and services, in which GDP is the only measure of a healthy and successful society, in which culture (intercultural dialogue, heritage in all forms, cultural diversity, creativity, transmission of knowledge) remains undervalued and underutilized in the push for SDG progress.

The current system needs to be retooled to ensure that all people, everywhere, have access to safe and affordable housing, it needs to acknowledge the value of common goods such as water and sanitation, and it needs to place care for our populations at the center of all policies. This calls for significantly reducing gaps in income and access to services, while enhancing the political participation of all and addressing accessibility barriers and discrimination.

**The Local Authorities Major Group calls for:**

- **Developing a social contract building on the voices and experiences of local communities, as a means to reverse the current trends and address the inequalities we face .**
- **Enhance the participation and representation of women and girls, addressing accessibility barriers and the discrimination facing marginalized groups to ensure all voices are at the decision-making tables.**
- **Recognize the right to water and sanitation as a global common good, to be collectively tackled, through local to global actions.**
- **Promoting housing and access to our common goods as a human right, paying closer attention to the needs of communities regardless of administrative status, placing people at the center of urban policy making.**
- **Analyzing the role of culture as a global public good, including greater consideration of culture’s role in supporting SDG achievement now, and the analysis of a potential stand-alone Culture Goal post-2030.**

**3. Changing our relationship with nature**

Changing our relationship with nature and our ecosystems will only be possible through localization processes that are nature-positive, bringing to consideration big and intermediary cities, small towns, and regions and territories, and reinforcing the notion of

systems of cities in the protection and promotion of local and global commons to regenerate livelihoods.

This new relationship with our nature must be grounded on proximity and circularity, focused on developing an alternative to the status quo with local ecological, economic and social value creation to reinvigorate the economy through sustainable, inclusive, and environmentally-sound models of production and consumption, fostering a fair and equal distribution of the benefits of climate action and through resilience building. Industry, innovation and infrastructure need to be reshaped from this lens, which includes rethinking social dialogue and ensuring decent work conditions for all.

Integrating proximity, biodiversity preservation and resilience approaches in policy-making and planning, aimed at transforming our societies' relationship with nature, will in turn promote meaningful change in our patterns of transport, work, habitat, culture, health, education and consumption that are central to preserve our planet, develop urban and territorial quality of life, and harness inclusive innovation value creation. The progressive integration of cities, peri-urban and rural areas, with ecosystems and the adoption of nature-based solutions are key to addressing the issue of climate change adaptation and to creating healthy living spaces. Local and regional governments are essential to embody a vision for a better relationship with nature as the closest level of government to communities and as the protectors of the biodiversity of their territories.

Expanding our understanding of adaptation and mitigation, recognizing migration as adaptation strategy and bringing all communities to the center as agents of change, is critical to address the root causes of the overlapping crises that our societies are undergoing. Fostering sustainability through social innovation is also about including the migrant and displaced communities, as well as indigenous communities whose knowledge and legacy has often been overlooked, as critical agents of change.

**The Local Authorities Major Group calls for:**

- **Recognizing the key role of local and regional governments, cities and territories in the protection and promotion of nature-positive local and global commons that contribute to regenerating livelihoods and to protecting our planet and ecosystems, and its direct link to the achievement of SDG 11 and all other SDGs and other international development agendas such as the Paris Agreement or the Sendai Framework.**
- **Supporting and fostering the transformation of our consumption and production patterns towards models grounded on proximity and circularity that are sustainable, inclusive, environmentally-sound and create ecological, cultural, economic and social value for communities.**
- **Including local and regional governments, who demonstrated the power of policy based on proximity, in climate, biodiversity, resilience and ocean and water governance at the global level.**

#### **4. Localizing the universal development agendas - Voluntary Local Reviews and Voluntary Subnational reviews: policy tools for transformation**

**Local and regional governments and their networks have been at the forefront of the localization of the universal development agendas. In recent years, monitoring and reporting processes have evolved, becoming tools for policy development and co-creation.** The total number of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) available worldwide has been growing exponentially with 214 from 44 countries, representing a total of 579 million inhabitants. Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) have been growing rapidly with 34 VSRs from 32 countries, representing 165,000 local governments and 1,3 billion inhabitants. These VLRs and VSRs have proved to not only have direct positive impacts in local governance by increasing transparency, accountability and ownership of the Global Goals by local and regional governments and their associations but also influence national dialogues and mechanisms for the implementation of the SDGs, and Voluntary National Reviews (VNR).

**Local and regional governments reiterate their commitment to fostering the development of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR) and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSR) with the full support of Local Government Associations,** promoting policy development and co-creation, ownership and the achievement of the SDGs, increasing local and regional government participation in national coordination mechanisms and raising awareness on the importance of localizing the SDGs.

**The Local Authorities Major Group calls for:**

- **Acknowledging VLR and VSR processes as policy tools integral to foster ownership and achievement of the universal development agendas and create more traction and ownership of the Goals.**
- **Involving LRGs and their associations in VNR processes, and promoting the development of VLRs and VSRs (country-wide, bottom-up subnational reporting processes on the state of localization of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in a specific country).**
- **The full recognition of monitoring and reporting processes such as VLRs and VSRs in official HLPF deliberations.**

#### **5. A revitalized multilateral system, high-impact partnerships, and a new financial system**

A revitalized multilateral system that builds on localization, local democracy and strengthened local self-government is imperative to ensure peace, unity and trust in our institutions and to build a new social contract. Co-responsibility and active participation of all citizens need to be at the center of global governance, and this calls for enhancing representation, inclusivity, and building transparent mechanisms of decision-making at all levels. **This is the way to build a multilateral system where all actors are included at the decision-making table, a stronger, more inclusive HLPF that institutionalizes dialogue with local and regional governments and which connects to other global agendas such as the New Urban Agenda.**

High impact partnerships for transformation will also be a critical milestone to foster innovation and bring forward the impact needed to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs in the coming years. Ones that are characterized by multi-stakeholder engagement, multi-level governance and policy co-creation can make the difference in closing the gap. The importance of partnerships for sustainable development goes beyond SDG17.

Ways for partnerships and cooperation to manage the interlinkages, synergies and integrated approach promoted by the SDGs include: the development of joint activities with external stakeholders (civil Society Organizations, universities, think tanks, etc.); the setting up of inter-departmental working methods (e.g. collaboration with colleagues from other departments on thematic issues, the use of tools for collaborative work; or choosing to focus the work on one/a few SDG(s). Ways to address the international dimension of the SDGs include: participation in national/international networks and fora (international events, campaigns, etc.); development of international/city-to-city or region-to-region partnerships (decentralized cooperation activities) and build-up of activities lobbying international organizations; development of training modules on how to integrate SDGs in decentralized cooperation.

A just, swift and resilient recovery from the interconnected crises the world faces today requires a strategic focus on renewing partnerships and facilitating access to adequate and sustainable funding. Building on the call from Our Common Agenda, that highlights how a true global economy needs adequately resourced public sectors for the delivery of global public goods, it will be critical to promote a more distributive economic system as well as fairer financial and commercial practices to protect and improve local service provision, address inequalities, and develop green and social infrastructure throughout the territory.

This recovery must take into account the principal challenges local and regional governments face in working to achieve the SDGs and other global agendas will also be key, including: inadequate human resources or weak capacities; limited support from national governments (in terms of administrative and financial support, capacity building, and human resources); limited local interest and/or awareness; insufficient financial resources (other than national subsidies) and, in general, limited coordination with other levels of government (e.g. overlapping responsibilities, difficulties in coordinating between national and local plans).

It must also take into account the principal benefits for local and regional governments in working to achieve the SDGs and other global agendas are: enhanced multi-level coordination including improved planning mechanisms at local level to integrate the SDGs and promote recovery; increased local interest and/or awareness as local governments gain a firmer grasp of the SDGs or better understanding of their relevance and no longer perceive the SDGs as a burden; adaptation of SDGs to better meet local priorities; introduction of legal and institutional reforms to empower local and regional governments (e.g. for the localization of the SDGs and to recover from the pandemic); enhanced participation of local non-governmental stakeholders.

#### **The Local Authorities Major Group calls for:**

- **Revitalizing the multilateral system based on trust, peace and sustainability from the bottom-up, forming the base of a new social contract driven by local action and guaranteeing local and regional governments and civil society are fully engaged by holding a permanent seat at decision-making tables.**

- **Renewing the notion of partnerships based on inter-governmental coordination; cooperation among key actors and sectors; as well as on social and institutional innovation.**
- **Rethink financing and revenue streams to achieve the global agendas through a renewed fiscal architecture and directly targeting financing mechanisms empowering local and regional governments to strengthen their own resources and achieve and localize the SDGs.**
- **Recognizing the role of local and regional governments multilateralism and contributing to global policy development in light of the SDG Summit, the UN Summit of the Future and the World Social Summit.**